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ABSTRACT

The author discusses essential elements of a preservice social studies methods course for elementary teachers. The knowledge and skill objectives to be achieved by students in methods courses and used as a guide by the instructor are outlined. A discussion follows. A social studies methods course should help students develop a personal working definition of social studies and the goals and objectives that should be accomplished in the elementary school. Since elementary social studies curriculum includes concepts from all of the social science disciplines, a methods course should help preservice teachers develop a knowledge and understanding of the major concepts of each discipline and how they are sequenced in the curriculum. One learning experience that proves effective in this process is to investigate an elementary social studies series and trace the scope and development of a concept through the grade levels. An absolutely essential element of a methods course is how it is presented. Students must be taught by the methods they are expected to use. Students should learn a category system for questioning and acquire knowledge and skill in the valuing process. An opportunity to actively participate with materials other than textbooks is an important aspect of the course. And, last there is evaluation. The methods of evaluation suggested for use in the classroom by the preservice teacher should also be demonstrated in their evaluation for the course. (Author/RM)

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National Council for Social Studies

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What are the Crucial Elements of a Social Studies Methods Course?

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In the process of designing a social studies methods course, the following thoughts should guide the designer.

What is Teaching?

Robert G. Ames

> Teaching is a process that can never be taught, but one that can seldom be executed successfully without training. It is half science, half art. The scientific principles can be learned, but the artistic elements of the process must come from the heart and soul of the teacher. Master teaching is the result of an adequate mixture of principle and emotion; of the teacher as a teacher and a person.

A methods course should be a mixture of scientific principles and experiences that develop the teacher as a person and the skill of teaching.

Within the context of this paper, my remarks are directed primarily toward a methods course for elementary teachers; however, most of the ideas would apply equally to secondary teachers. As we direct our attention to what a methods course should be, we need to keep in mind the following conclusions about social studies education in the nation's schools as reported in the National Science Foundation studies.

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- the teacher is the key to what social studies will be for any student.
- materials from the new social studies project are not being selected for classroom use.
- the dominant instructional tool continues to be the textbook.
- little attention is given to societal concerns.
- knowing is largely information oriented.
- mode of instruction continues to be large group recitation and lecture.
- students tend to find social studies content and mode of instruction uninteresting.
- affective objectives are rarely a part of the curriculum.

If the previous conclusions describe the state of social studies education in our schools, the preservice methods courses need to address those issues. Therefore, the objectives to be achieved by the students in methods courses and used as a guide by the instructor fall into two categories: knowledge and skills.

Knowledge Objectives

1. The student will formulate his/her definition of social studies and outline the major objectives for elementary social studies.
2. The student will identify the unique contribution of each of the social sciences to the content of the social studies.
3. The student will identify the teaching strategies that are most effective in introducing and extending concept development.
4. The student will identify the teaching strategies that are most effective in inquiry and unit teaching.
5. The student will identify the difference among the indoctrination, value analysis, value clarification and moral development in value education.
6. The student will define global education and contrast it with multicultural education, discussing cultural pluralism indicating ways of implementing both in the curriculum.
7. The student will identify at least two controversial issues from society and discuss why they should be considered in the classroom.

8. The student will identify the major map and globe skills that should be developed in the elementary school.

9. The student will discuss three social studies curriculum projects (law related, global, career, economics, etc.) listing the unique features of each.

Skill Objective

When developing skill lesson plans, the following should be remembered:

The student will assess the varying abilities of the individual children and plan their lessons to meet the needs of each. This will be accomplished by varying the materials to meet visual, auditory, or physical learning styles, also exhibiting an awareness of those children who need special consideration to overcome physical disabilities and improve their self concepts.

1. The student will introduce a concept, delineating its attributes, presenting examples and non-examples, and applying it to a new situation.

2. The student exhibits an understanding of questioning techniques in increasing children's thinking skills by including all levels of questions, in conducting an effective inquiry lesson creating an atmosphere that permits children to ask questions and give answers not indicating whether an answer is right or wrong; focusing the directions of the questions toward the goal of inquiry, and using motivating techniques that will encourage most children to participate.

3. The student will select a value oriented issue and conduct a value session, motivating freedom of expression of views from children in assessing their own values on the issues.

4. The student will develop a map and globe activity to introduce one of the major map or globe skills.

The way in which the learning experiences of the course are presented should also develop attitudes toward social studies and methods of teaching.

Definition and goals of social studies

Since elementary teachers are expected to be prepared to teach all subject areas, there is a tendency to develop priorities in the time devoted to social studies in the classroom. These priorities, whether directed by interest, competence, or school curriculum, will determine what, if any, social studies will

be taught. Thus, an essential element of a social studies methods course is to develop a personal working definition of social studies and the goals or objectives that should be accomplished in the elementary school. A preservice teacher should be able to defend the inclusion of social studies in the curriculum. Why it is there and what it is expected to accomplish for the children. Preservice elementary teachers often have negative attitudes toward social studies as a result of their own school experiences or lack of social science background. Also, they are unaware of the attitudes of parents and children toward social studies.

One of the first experiences required of the students is to interview at least three parents, teachers and students. The following questions should be asked during the interviews:

What is your definition of social studies?

What do you think social studies should do for the children?

What priority would you give it in the curriculum?

With the data from the interviews compiled in class, the students become aware of attitudes toward social studies and expectations that parents, teachers, and students have for the subject. Readings from the literature, as well as class discussions, add to their knowledge of social studies, and further clarify its role in the curriculum.

Knowledge of the social sciences concepts and their sequence in the elementary curriculum.

Most college and university general education curriculums will not require more than 9-12 hours of the social sciences, therefore, an elementary preservice teacher will not have knowledge of more than two or three of the social sciences.

Since elementary social studies curriculums include concepts from all of the social science disciplines, there is a need to develop a knowledge and understanding of the major concepts of each discipline and how they are sequenced in the curriculum.

One learning experience that proves effective in this process is to investigate an elementary social studies series and trace the scope and development of a concept through the grade levels. The following chart records the findings:

Concept:

Grade	Context	Depth	Method of Instruction
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			

In addition to learning when the concept is introduced, the student also learns what methodology or teaching strategy is utilized.

Methods of Teaching

An absolutely essential aspect of a methods course is "how is it presented?" Talking about how methods should be developed falls short of achieving the objectives. Unless students are taught by those methods, it is highly unlikely that they will be able to effectively use them. Therefore, if concepts are to be introduced by the Taba or Gagné model, then those same teaching models should be demonstrated.

Many students have never been exposed to inquiry teaching in their schooling,

and thus have no feeling for how it works." The opportunity to learn something through the inquiry process thus makes it more meaningful and also develops an attitude toward the methodology.

Learning a category system for questioning is another essential. Since questioning skills by the teacher will develop effective thought processes in students, an opportunity to develop that skill is a necessity. All methods should be practiced through peer teaching, micro teaching and practicum experiences in actual classrooms.

Another aspect of methods courses should be that of value analysis. Not only should the student acquire knowledge and skill in the valuing process, but each individual should have the opportunity to apply those valuing skills to questions of what to teach and how to teach social studies.

Materials

An opportunity to actively participate with materials other than textbooks is an important aspect of the methods. Current available materials such as simulations, multi media, etc. should be used by the instructor. Also, an opportunity to evaluate materials with established criteria should be part of the methods course experience.[1]

Evaluation

The process of evaluation in a methods course may be somewhat different than other courses. Once again the methods of evaluation suggested for use in the classroom by the preservice teacher should also be demonstrated in their evaluation for the course. The opportunity for mastery learning of skills is necessary.

One of the most effective evaluation procedures that I have used has been the option of demonstrating the acquisition of knowledge through small

[1]Skeel, Dorothy J. The Challenge of Teaching Social Studies in the Elementary School, 3rd Ed. Goodyear Publishing Company, Santa Monica Calif., 1979, p. 285-291.

group discussion. Students form small groups of five or six members who meet with the instructor. The knowledge objectives to be achieved are identified before the discussion. Within the discussion, students have the opportunity to hear the opinions of others, clarify their understanding of points, ask questions and receive immediate feedback. Students often comment that this type of evaluation procedure provides them with a synthesis of the course content and it ties together any loose ends.

Hopefully, preservice teachers will complete a social studies methods course with knowledge of social studies education, its purpose and goals; skills to effectively implement it in the classroom; and confidence in their ability to make decisons about what to teach, how to teach, and when to teach it.